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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 4062  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0328  
RUEHQH/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1924  
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY 0890  
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0282  
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SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/BSC, INR/B

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CI](#) [CO](#) [XM](#)

SUBJECT: CHILE: OPPOSITION LEADER LOOKS FOR INCREMENTAL GAINS IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. SANTIAGO 735  
[¶](#)B. SANTIAGO 856

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Simons for reason 1.4 (b).

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: Senator Andres Allamand, a founding member of the National Renewal (RN) center-right political party, told Ambassador the opposition hopes to improve its performance in municipal elections on October 29, but an outright victory is out of reach. Instead, the opposition Alianza coalition, which includes RN and the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), hopes to narrow the margin of victory that the ruling Concertacion coalition enjoyed in the 2004 municipal election. Allamand also spoke about regional politics, noting an axis of like-minded nations is developing across western Latin America, with Chilean, Peruvian, Colombian, and Mexican leaders showing similar political orientations. End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (U) Ambassador, accompanied by E/Pol Counselor and Poloff, met with Senator Allamand September 29 as part of an on-going effort to reach out to major political parties in advance of Chile's October 26 municipal elections.

Opposition Hopes to Narrow the Gap in Municipal Elections

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[¶](#)3. (C) An outright win is out of reach for Alianza, Allamand said, but he expects its candidates will be able to improve on its performance in the 2004 municipal elections. In 2004, the ruling Concertacion coalition demolished Alianza predictions of a close race and the possible defeat of Concertacion, emerging from the municipal elections 10 points ahead of Alianza in city council races and six points ahead in mayoral contests. This year, Allamand said Alianza would lower expectations publicly, but still hoped it could narrow this gap by two to three points in the October elections, and possibly by as much as five points.

[¶](#)4. (C) Allamand explained Alianza faces an uphill battle as

Concertacion always does well in municipal elections, which are held simultaneously across the nation every four years. Concertacion holds a majority of city council and mayoral seats across the country, and historically incumbents have been difficult to unseat in Chile. Allamand noted a typical pattern is the approval ratings of mayors increasing during their first four-year term in office, then flattening out for the next term, and then declining in the third or fourth term. Following this pattern, most incumbents are not vulnerable until they have served 12 years or more.

Concertacion benefits from voters' feelings that they have a personal connection to their mayors, from patronage politics, and from a network of supporters that the mayors are able to create.

**¶15. (U)** Note: In the calculus of Chilean domestic politics, the success of political parties and coalitions in municipal elections is judged based on a number of factors: the number of mayors elected from each party/coalition, the number of city council members elected from each party/coalition, the spread between the overall number of votes each group receives for all of their mayoral and city council elections, and the outcome of key races. In 2004, Alianza received 39 percent of all mayoral votes and 38 per cent of city council votes, compared to Concertacion's 45 and 48 percent, respectively. In reality, Concertacion's showing was even stronger as many of the mayoral and city council candidates who ran as independents had defected from the Concertacion to run as independents when the coalition selected another candidate for its slate. End Note.

#### An Axis of Like-Minded Leaders in Latin America

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**¶16. (C)** Senator Allamand noted there is an axis of like-minded political leaders running along the western coast of Latin America, with the leaders of Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Chile sharing similar world views and political leanings.

The Ambassador added that these same countries--along with Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Canada--are the countries that have free trade agreements with the U.S., and met with President Bush last month in New York to begin to work together to broaden the benefits of trade. These countries are also more interested in trading with Asia than are other countries in the region. These political similarities notwithstanding, Allamand remarked Chile has long had a natural sympathy towards Brazil ("older brother") and Ecuador ("younger brother"), and sees Uruguay as its most similar neighbor.

#### Allamand's Colombia Connections

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**¶17. (SBU)** Senator Allamand was part of a now-famous July 2008 trip to Colombia with opposition presidential candidate Sebastian Pinera and RN Senator Alberto Espina. During this trip, Senator Espina obtained a copy of a 35-page Colombian intelligence report detailing alleged contacts between Chilean sympathizers and Colombian FARC rebels. Although the Colombian government had passed this information to Chilean National Intelligence Agency head Gustavo Villalobos in May, press interest in the case reached a fever pitch in early September with allegations that a La Moneda employee had FARC connections (Ref B).

**¶18. (SBU)** Allamand noted that he knows former Colombian President Andres Pastrana well. He also got to know Luis Alberto Moreno, current president of the Inter-American Development Bank, during Allamand's time in Washington when Moreno was Colombian ambassador to the U.S. Allamand commented that he is "no fan of Uribe" and hopes that the current President does not seek a second term.

#### Comment

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**¶19. (C)** Alianza's play-it-safe strategy of setting modest expectations is a logical reaction to their disappointing

performance in the 2004 municipal elections. Allamand's assessment that Alianza is likely to narrow--but not erase--the gap with Concertacion mirrors what progressive political leader Pepe Auth, president of the Party for Democracy (PPD), told the Ambassador several weeks ago (Ref A).

SIMONS